



Testimony of

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***SB 972 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROGRAM
REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING SCHOOL
PARAPROFESSIONALS STAFFING***

Program Review and Investigations Committee
February 27, 2015

Good afternoon. Representative Carpino, Senator Fonfara and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Steve McKeever and I am First Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of local unions representing nearly 30,000 public and private sector workers including approximately 4,000 paraprofessionals. It is on their behalf that I am here to testify on SB 972 An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning School Paraprofessionals Staffing.

As a teacher, I know the important role paraprofessionals play in the reinforcement of academic instruction and the vital assistance they provide to special education students. We came to you last session with concerns about disturbing staffing practices across the state. It is not uncommon for paraprofessionals to be diverted from their regular student assignments to substitute for a teacher, cover lunch or bus duty or take on additional student support assignments.

I want to thank you for authorizing the study and thank the research staff for the thorough and thoughtful review of the issue. The final report provided a number of excellent recommendations that we believe, if implemented, would address many of the staffing challenges faced by school paraprofessionals. We are therefore disappointed that SB 972 does not contain the most effective of those recommendations:

- **Recommendation #3:** Require the State Department of Education to inspect of a random sample of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) to ensure that the language outlining paraprofessional services is written with sufficient degree of specificity. This would prevent districts from drafting overly vague language

that would provide too much flexibility in human resource matters rather than putting the emphasis on student needs.

- **Recommendation #6:** Require the State Department of Education to provide guidance to districts about how IEPs should be drafted to specify the frequency and duration of services and supports and provide examples of both appropriate and inappropriate language. This will ensure that districts write IEPs clearly enough to avoid confusion and misunderstanding and improve compliance on a number of issues, including non-certified staff needs.
- **Recommendation #7:** Require the State Department of Education to conduct a random audit of a sample of districts' substitute teacher rosters and verify that each individual listed has a bachelor's degree, as required by statute. Currently there is not enforcement of this statute. Recommendation #7 would mark an important beginning and it would simultaneously verify that paraprofessionals are not being pulled from their duties to serve as a substitute teacher.

SB 972 in its current form, together with recommendations 3, 6 and 7 would provide the mechanisms to address the problems we brought to the committee last session. We urge you to JFS this bill with those improvements. Thank you.